

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8052
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 2368

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ASEC SHUM ES
SUBJ: SECURITY WATCH COMMITTEE MEETING
--POSSIBLE OCCUPATION OF
EMBASSY PREMISES

REF: SAN SALVADOR 0762

I. INTRODUCTION

AN EXPANDED VERSION OF EMBASSY SAN SALVADOR'S SECURITY
WATCH COMMITTEE MET TWICE WITHIN THE PAST WEEK TO CONSIDER
THE CURRENT THREAT OF PEACEFUL OCCUPATION OF EMBASSY CHANCERY
PREMISES BY ACTIVIST FORCES DEMONSTRATING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
OBJECTIVES. THE DEPARTMENT'S GUIDANCE WILL BE APPRECIATED.

II. BACKGROUND

A. IN RECENT WEEKS WE HAVE REPORTED THE PEACEFUL
OCCUPATION OF THE EMBASSIES OF COSTA RICA, PANAMA, SWITZERLAND
AND VENEZUELA BY SIZEABLE NUMBERS OF MEMBERS OF THE POPULAR
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REVOLUTIONARY BLOC (BPR), AND OF RED CROSS HEADQUARTERS IN
BOTH SAN SALVADOR AND SANTA ANA BY ANOTHER GROUP, FAPU.
IN ALL CASES, OCCUPIERS SOUGHT (AS THE PRICE OF THEIR
DEPARTURE) TO ENLIST THE SUPPORT OF FOREIGN ENTITIES IN
THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE GOES. IN ALL
CASES, SUCH SUPPORT WAS REFUSED ON GROUNDS THAT THIS
WOULD CONSTITUTE INADMISSIBLE INTERVENTION IN THE INTERNAL

AFFAIRS OF EL SALVADOR.

B. EL SALVADOR AUTHORITIES OFFERED TO EJECT THE DEMONSTRATORS IF SO REQUESTED. BUT IN THE ABSENCE OF SUCH REQUEST, THEY SAID THEY COULD NOT INTRUDE UPON THE DIPLOMATIC PREMISES INVOLVED.

C. THE SWISS GOVERNMENT'S IMMEDIATE REACTION WAS TO REQUEST EJECTION. THE THREE LATIN AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS, HOWEVER, PROFESSED TO SEE SUFFICIENT LINKAGE TO THE CONCEPT OF ASYLUM SO THAT THEY NOT ONLY TOLERATED THE PRESENCE OF THE OCCUPYING FORCES BUT ALSO SUPPLIED THEM WITH FOOD AND WATER DURING THEIR NINE-DAY STAY. UNCONVINCED BUT UNWILLING TO RISK ISOLATION AND PERSONAL RETALIATION, THE SWISS CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DISSUADED HIS GOVERNMENT AND RELUCTANTLY WENT ALONG IN A SOLID FRONT WITH HIS THREE LATIN AMERICAN COLLEAGUES.

D. NEGOTIATION WITH THE OCCUPYING FORCES PROVED MOST FRUSTRATING. EVERY PROPOSAL HAD TO BE REFERRED BACK TO BPR AUTHORITIES, AND IT TOOK NINE DAYS FINALLY TO SECURE THEIR DEPARTURE.

E. BY VIRTUE OF THE DYNAMICS OF THE LOCAL SITUATION, OUR EMBASSY IS A MORE LOGICAL AND POLITICALLY ATTRACTIVE TARGET THAN ANY OF THE FOUR WHICH WERE OCCUPIED. IN
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ADDITION, ONE OF THE OCCUPIED AMBASSADORS WAS TOLD BY HIS "VISITORS" THAT THEY WOULD NOT REST UNTIL THEY HAD OCCUPIED THE AMERICAN EMBASSY.

III. SECURITY WATCH COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

A. AGAINST THIS BACKDROP, THE EXPANDED SECURITY WATCH COMMITTEE MET TWICE TO CONSIDER OUR MOST APPROPRIATE COURSE OF ACTION. FROM THE OUTSET, IT RECOGNIZED THAT WE ARE PERHAPS IRREMEDIABLY VULNERABLE TO ANY PURPOSEFUL INFILTRATION (SUCH AS HAPPENED IN THE OTHER CASES) BY VIRTUE OF OUR LONG VISA LINES AND THE MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED VISA APPLICANTS FLOWING THROUGH OUR PREMISES EACH DAY.

B. WE HAVE TAKEN APPROPRIATE STEPS SUCH AS CUTTING DOWN ON THE NUMBER OF VISA APPLICANTS INSIDE THE BUILDING AT ANY ONE TIME, INITIATING THE USE OF METAL DETECTORS, AND PRESSING THE DEPARTMENT FOR FASTER ACTION ON OUR HARDENING OF ACCESS CONTROLS. WHILE THESE CAN LIMIT THE DIMENSION OF THE PROBLEM, SECURITY WATCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS WERE UNANIMOUS IN CONSIDERING THAT THEY CANNOT

ELIMINATE IT.

C. OUR EMBASSY PER SE DOES NOT HAVE THE SAME TRADITIONAL COMMITMENT TO THE CONCEPT OF ASYLUM AS DOES A LATIN AMERICAN EMBASSY. WE ARE ALSO CREDITED BOTH BY LOCAL FORCES AND BY OUR DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES WITH BEING LARGER, BETTER PROTECTED, BETTER ARMED, ETC., THAN ANY OTHER EMBASSY AND IN FACT ARE THOUGHT TO BE RELATIVELY INVINCIBLE. THESE FACTS ARGUE FOR A FAST AND EFFECTIVE RESPONSE ON OUR PART IF WE ARE NOT TO FORFEIT AN IMAGE WHICH HAS ALWAYS CONTAINED ADVANTAGE FOR THE US IN BOTH A POLITICAL AND A SECURITY SENSE. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE ARE WORKING NOW IN THE SHADOW OF RECENT PRECEDENT, AND ANY VIGOROUS RESPONSE OF OURS WOULD TEND TO BE PUBLICLY CONFIDENTIAL

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CONTRASTED WITH THE RELATIVELY PASSIVE POSITION TAKEN BY THE MUCH SMALLER AND WEAKER ENTITIES RECENTLY OCCUPIED. SUCH CONTRAST WOULD BRING APPLAUSE FROM SOME AND CONDEMNATION FROM OTHERS.

D. THE SECURITY WATCH COMMITTEE RECOMMENDED THAT WE CONTINUE TO TAKE ALL POSSIBLE STEPS TO GUARD AGAINST INFILTRATION AND OCCUPATION. ALSO, SHOULD IT OCCUR DESPITE THESE EFFORTS, THAT THE GROUND-FLOOR CONSULAR SECTION BE IMMEDIATELY CLOSED DOWN AND THE HUNDREDS OF PERSONS DAILY SEEKING CONSULAR SERVICES BE INFORMED THAT ACTION OF THE OCCUPYING FORCES WAS PRECLUDING SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC.

E. THE ULTIMATE QUESTION, HOWEVER, IS WHETHER WE SHOULD TOLERATE AN ALIEN PRESENCE ON OUR GROUND FLOOR AND ENTER INTO PROTRACTED NEGOTIATIONS, OR ALTERNATIVELY REQUEST GOES AUTHORITIES IMMEDIATELY TO EJECT ANY SIT-IN FORCES FROM THE PREMISES.

F. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT YET TAKEN ANY FIRM DECISION, THE SECURITY WATCH COMMITTEE VOTED 7-2 IN FAVOR OF REQUESTING LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO EFFECT IMMEDIATE EXPULSION IN A NON-VIOLENT MANNER OF ANY SIT-IN DEMONSTRATORS WHO OCCUPY EMBASSY PREMISES.

IV. ACTION REQUESTED:

WE SHALL APPRECIATE ANY REACTION OR GUIDANCE THE DEPARTMENT MAY CARE TO OFFER.
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NOTE BY OC/T: TELEGRAM DELAYED IN TRANSMISSION.
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